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PUBLIC LIBRARIES ACT.

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REPORT

OF THE PROCEEDINGS AT A

PUBLIC MEETING,

HELD AT

BURSLEM, ON THE 2ND OF SEPTEMBER, 1863,

FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADOPTING

"THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS ACT, ~~1863~~."

(Re-printed from the "Staffordshire Sentinel.")

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ADOPTION OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES ACT AT BURSLEM.

A public meeting, called and presided over by J. S. Hill, Esq., Chief Bailiff, pursuant to a requisition containing 850 signatures, was held in the large room of the Town Hall, Burslem, on Wednesday evening, for the purpose of adopting the "Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1855," and "in order that the lands, buildings, and all other real and personal property presented to or purchased for the Wedgwood Institute, or to be hereafter acquired for the purposes of the public library, museum, or school of art, may be vested in the governing body of the town, for the free use and benefit of the inhabitants of Burslem for ever." The Hall was well filled some time before eight o'clock, the hour fixed for the commencement of the meeting.

The business was opened by Mr. J. LOWNDES, who read the requisition and the notice convening the meeting.

The CHAIRMAN, who was warmly received, then said, whether they regarded the nature of the requisition which had just been read, or whether they looked at the object for which that meeting had been convened, there could be no doubt but that was one of the most important assemblages ever held in Burslem. He was glad, in spite of the inclemency of the weather, to see so many present to participate in the proceedings, and to determine upon a measure of such importance to the community. The requisition was an important one, not merely on account of the numbers who had signed it, but also on account of the representative position of the persons whose names they found there. If they would look they would find the names of men of all shades of opinion, Protestant and Catholic, Liberal and Conservative, united for once as one man to endeavour to promote the well-being of the town. Any one who had taken the trouble to read the names would see that he had signed it in his capacity as a manufacturer, and he had done so because he believed the benefits that would result to them from this Act were clear and obvious, while any objections that could be urged against it were weak and frivolous. If he had had the opportunity he should have been glad to have signed the requisition in his capacity of a magistrate, because anything which tended to the education of the people tended in an inverse ratio to the decrease of poverty and crime. (Applause.) As he was there, occupying the chair in his official capacity, it would not become him to enter into

arguments in support of the object for which the meeting was convened, but it devolved upon him to see that none but ratepayers took part in the proceedings, and knowing how orderly meetings usually were in Burslem it was perhaps unnecessary to express a hope that every one who choose to speak would have a fair and impartial hearing. (Applause.)

Mr. R. HEATON (solicitor) was the first speaker called upon to address the meeting. He said he had been requested to propose "that the Public Libraries Act, 1855, be adopted for the district of Burslem," and he must say that as far as his own approval was concerned he never acceded to a request with greater pleasure or with more entire satisfaction to himself. (Applause.) The resolution seemed to him to involve two questions of a somewhat different character, firstly, was knowledge desirable at all, and, if so, what really were the best means of extending it? The first question he was thankful to say, at this day, must be a very narrow question indeed. He could remember the time, even in his short life, when a poor girl applying for a situation as domestic servant, if she could read and write it was held to be a positive disadvantage, because if she could she, it was feared, would read her master's letters. (Laughter.) But he was thankful that day, or rather that night, of ignorance had passed away, and the man who could come to them in this day and say that knowledge was not good, that next to Godliness it was not the greatest good, would only convince them that he himself had very little of that commodity. (Applause.) The other question was one of greater importance, and that was then the question for their consideration, namely, what were the best means of extending knowledge in a community like that. The promoters of that movement contended that a free library established under the compulsory provisions of Mr. Ewart's Act was the very thing for Burslem, and as he said before, he entirely concurred in that view. He believed, however, that there were some parties who entertained objections to it, and he thought, in the few remarks he had to make, the better plan would be to confine himself to those objections which had been and which were likely to be urged against a free library, leaving it to others who knew more about the subject than he did to tell them what benefits were likely to arise from an institution like that. One of the objections urged against it was this: Some people said, "If you want a free library start one for yourselves, we don't want one; let it be a voluntary affair, we like a free will offering, we like to see a cheerful giver, let people give who like to give, but if people don't like to give, then in common honesty let them alone." (Hear, hear, from a ratepayer in the body of the hall.)

He was thankful to the party who echoed that sentiment, because it showed that his view was not altogether fallacious. There could be no greater fallacy than to try to induce people to believe that such a voluntary principle could be carried out. Every attempt to carry it out must prove utterly abortive. A free library should be, as its name implied, perfectly free; that should be its essential characteristic. It would be that which, in his estimation, would give it its chief value. It should be free as the mountain moorland air which he and they breathed,—and they knew how that acted, perfectly irrespective of person or class. The opulent man opened his drawing-room window, and the working man unlocked his tiny casement, and the air, free to go everywhere, rushed in through both, unless shut out by their own barbarous exclusion of it,—and like that ought to be the diffusion of knowledge. He longed to see the day,—and if their resolution was carried at that meeting, (and he had no misgivings about it), the vision would soon be realised,—when, whilst the higher classes, so worthily represented by their Chairman that evening, would be sitting at one end of the table revelling in the beauties of Dante or Tennyson, the working men would be sitting at the other end enjoying their Milton or Macaulay, and feeling they had quite as much, and in fact just the same, right to be there. But that they would never see if the thing was to be got up on the perfectly voluntary system. The men of Anglo-Saxon blood were the most thankful in one sense and the most thankless in another. They did not perhaps sufficiently prize gratuities. They thought nothing absolutely their own which they had had no hand in procuring. If they paid part of the purchase money they would feel they had paid for it, not much it might be, but they had paid what the law asked them for, and therefore they had as great a right to be there as the greatest man in the town. (Applause.) Another objection to the voluntary system was this; it pressed unequally, it was not fair. The willing horse had to draw, not the strongest horse, and there was a great difference in that they knew. Gentlemen who stood around him knew what it was in Burslem to go on a begging expedition. They went to one gentleman; they knew he was a man of large heart. They told him their tale, and almost before it was told his contribution was in their pocket, and they went away thanking heaven that there were such men of human mould. They went to another man in a far different position; they knew where the first gave a hundred shillings he ought to give a hundred pounds. They told that man their tale, and he agreed with them in everything they said until they came to the pocket. Then there was a lamentable falling off, and the man gave them something which was only an

apology, and but a very shabby apology for not giving at all. (Laughter and applause.) Now, he wanted to see perfect equality. Let the man whose broad acres or whose well filled crates represented £2,000 a-year be taxed upon £2,000 and give in proportion to his means, and let the working man whose tenement represented only a £5 rental also give according to his means. In one case it might be £10 and in the other only ten pence, but there would be equality and perfect justice and then the working men of Burslem would be the last to complain. (Applause.) Other objectors had said, "we don't want a public library; let those have it who want it." Were they sure they did not want it? There was an old book which he, and he hoped everyone present revered which said, "No man liveth unto himself," and depend upon it that was a law of their being which they could not shake off even if they would; it was Heaven's law and they could not annul it. He would give them an illustration: A neighbour of his had a field overgrown with thistles. He went to the man and complained, and the answer he got was, "What, Mr. Heaton, what has that to do with you, it is not yours; I pay my rent, and what has the cultivation of the field to do with you?" But stay a while; those thistles would begin to seed, and some day there would be a high wind, which would waft that seed into his genial soil, and he should have a bed of thistles born in a day. He called upon them to mind their neighbour's thistles. It was not the fact that they had nothing to do with their neighbours, and they would feel this truth in a terrible retribution some day if they did not recognise it in movements like the present. (Applause.) If they did not want a free library for themselves and neighbours, they would for their children. He was a father, and he could therefore speak to them with warm affection and with great sincerity. Would not they want it for their children? If the history of every man and woman could be written with truth, it would be found that the leading features of their character had not their origin while they were at work at their ordinary occupations, but during their leisure hours, when they had nothing to do. An old divine had said "The devil rocks the idle man's cradle," and they might rely upon it they had nothing to do but to turn their children on the streets at night, and they would have plenty of thistles. What he had to say to them was this, If they wanted to keep their children from the public-house they must give them a more attractive place to go to. (Applause.) They must substitute books for beer; let the reading-room supersede the public-house; let the wholesome game of chess with its healthy accompaniments, take the place of dominoes and loo, with their attractions of malt and hops, and other

things which he would not enumerate, not because he could not name them, but because, perhaps, he had better not on that occasion. Other speakers would succeed him, men who understood the business of the meeting much better than he did, but again he would conjure them not to let that opportunity of bettering their condition pass, and not to let party feeling or prejudice warp their judgment on a question of so great importance. Talk of the taxation! A greater error was never known. They complained of taxes when imposed upon them, but whoever complained of a tax voluntarily adopted; it was then not a tax. They said they would give sixpence a year for benefits untold and incalculable; was that a tax? Nothing of the kind. The galling chain of taxation was felt because it was woven round their bodies whether they would or not, but there they were called upon to exercise a free volition, and he was sure the more they thought of this object the more likely they would be to approve it. They wanted the assent of two-thirds present that night, but he believed they should have three-thirds. He need not recapitulate his arguments. If they valued happiness and security, if they had any regard for their neighbours, if they thought of themselves or of their children, they were wrapped up in one alternative, there was only one thing they could do, and that was to give the movement their free, their hearty, and their unanimous approval. (Loud applause.)

Mr. JOHN GRIFFITHS said he was sorry the committee had not chosen a more efficient individual to second the resolution, but at the same time he might say that he had been on the Wedgwood Institute Committee from the commencement of its canvass for subscriptions towards raising that building. He stood before them also as an operative, and because he believed the measure to be a good one. (Applause.) He was the father of a large family, and that was another reason why he was there supporting a measure like that. It was somewhere about twenty years ago when he first came to reside in the town of Burslem, and when he cast his eye back to the time, what a great advance he could see had taken place. It was really not the same Burslem it was twenty years ago, and it was to still further that progress in the habits of the people that he stood there advocating the cause then before them. He believed it to be a good cause because anything which would elevate the class to which he belonged certainly must be a good cause. The reading of good books and good newspapers certainly had a tendency to raise his class, and where was the working man, he should like to know, who would oppose a movement like that for the paltry sake of a rate of a penny in the pound?

He must be a very selfish man indeed, and could not have much regard for his own children, to say nothing of the rising generation around him. He thought it would be a great privilege for working men to be able to go into a large room such as that, and take what books they had a mind to read from the shelves. He knew that many bright geniuses, Livingstone, Arkwright, Stevenson, and others had risen from the class to which he belonged, and he also knew that many more would have risen from that class had they not been crippled in getting the means to elevate their minds. (Applause.) When he could see and hear of this man of eminence and that man of eminence being pointed at and acknowledged as having risen from the class to which he belonged, was he not justified in standing up to forward a movement which would give to his children and the children of others, if they had the capability, the opportunity of becoming great. (Applause.) He had made up his mind to do what he considered right, let who would point the finger of scorn. He had endeavoured for years to do his utmost, if God gave him health and strength, to leave Burslem in a better condition than he found it. (Applause.)

The CHAIRMAN then announced that, if any ratepayer had questions to ask or remarks to make, that was the time for him to do so.

Mr. GOODFELLOW said, when he spoke against the adoption of the Act, they must not understand him to be speaking against the advancement of learning in the district, but he thought it was not at all generous to the ratepayers of Burslem to propose to add another rate, even though it was only a penny in the pound, to those which they already had to pay. For himself he did not care so much, but, at the same time, as ratepayers, it behoved them to look after their own welfare, and if another tax were put upon the rate books there was no knowing where it would stop. The circumstances of many of the ratepayers were such that they could not pay the rates already imposed upon them, and it would, therefore, be a great hardship to tax them still further. He should be sorry to raise his voice against anything that would promote the education of the working classes, but, if the library was established, it would not be a working man's library, because potters, after a day's labour, would not go to an institution of that kind to sit down two or three hours and associate with the men who frequented the place. He knew potters were so "sheepish" they would not go, and still they would have to pay. There were a good many who required education, who did not know A from B, but, at the same time, they would have to pay just the same as those who could read and write and who would have the benefit of the institution. The

rates could not be well collected now, and if they were increased he thought it would be worse still. (Applause.)

A RATEPAYER said he had a large family, but he would rather give 1s. at once than have it put on as a rate. There was another thing he should also like to mention. When they came from work at night he should not like to see a policeman to drive them away from the door. (Laughter.)

Mr. R. GILMORE said he was glad a little discussion had arisen. Most working men present knew that there was a want in Burslem of somewhere to spend a leisure half-hour. Their friend in the corner (Mr. Goodfellow) made the remark, and he had a right to make it, that working men were so "sheepish" that they would not attend the Institute. (Applause.) They all knew that if the working men would hold their heads up, the "sheepishness" would wear away. The reason he advocated a measure of that sort was that the working man should have an opportunity of showing his face. (Applause.) It was a principle with most Englishmen to like independence, to be as independent as they possibly can, and if they could get the means of educating themselves for fivepence or sixpence a year, who would object to it? He remembered being in one of the free libraries in Manchester, and he should like to have the same in the Potteries. The only condition he found in Manchester was that the working man should have his hands clean washed, that he should not dirty the books, and a very proper thing too. They did not require them to have a starched shirt on, or to wear rings on their hands. He had seen working men in Manchester go and read for twenty minutes in their dinner hour. They did not look at him as he walked through; they did not trouble their heads about him, they were too anxious to learn a little. (Applause.) He was not in favour of the scheme simply because of his own family. He did not expect it would be any great benefit to himself, but when he had half an hour to spare he should like to be able to go into a room and take up a book; it was the want of every working man, and was a thing which all who wished well to their families ought to be proud of. (Applause.) He was as much opposed to an undue extension of the rates as any man could be, but they would not have so great an amount to pay if the Libraries Act was in operation. He believed his friend who had just spoken and who he knew had a large family, would be benefited by the Act. If he had only one child with capabilities for learning, that child might go to the library and there learn that which his father was not able to provide for him and which might be of use to him through life. That was one reason why he supported the movement, and he hoped the meeting would not be led away by unfair

reasoning. He believed there was a great mistake in the minds of the working men. Many thought that any amount of rate could be put on, but if they would look at the Act they would find that it could not exceed 1d. in the pound per year. There was also another thing which he wished to mention. He liked self-government, and if the library was to be placed in the hands of a certain class of men for ever he should oppose it, but as long as the ratepayers had the power of choosing a certain class of men he approved it. He believed they had a class of men in that neighbourhood whom they could compel to do right, even if they were otherwise disposed. (Laughter and applause.) If a man proved obnoxious to them at the Board of Guardians or elsewhere they had no occasion to send him the next year, and if they acted on that they should not be far out of it. He, therefore, would advise them to try the Libraries Act as they had done in Manchester, and he believed it would be a great benefit to the township. (Applause.)

The CHAIRMAN then read the 15th clause of the Act of Parliament, which provides that the rate for the support of the Public Library shall not exceed 1d. in the pound in any one year.

Mr. W. H. MAYER said he was satisfied that anything short of the Libraries Act would never answer for Burslem, and he spoke from eighteen years' experience which he had had in connection with Mechanics' Institutions and news rooms. In answer to his friend in the corner, Mr. Goodfellow, as to working men being "sheepish" and not attending an institution like that, he would say that it was because they were not accustomed to it, and if they did not adopt the Act they never would be. (Applause.) He had canvassed working men to become members of the news room in the Town Hall, and they did not like to do it because the amount, 10s. per year, was large. And so it was to a man with a large family, but 6d. a year was not—(applause)—and it was evident that the man with a large family would benefit the most. He had no family, and they would, therefore, give him credit for not being interested on that account, but he was anxious to see that town equal to any town in the kingdom. He was satisfied that a more intelligent class of individuals did not exist than in this locality. He would appeal to Oddfellows and Foresters whether the suggestions made at their gatherings by men from this district were not acknowledged to be as wise and as practical as any and as likely to promote the interest of all? He therefore said, let them adopt the Act, and be attendants of the reading room, and they might depend upon it that it would be for the advantage of them all. (Applause.) Their Chairman had read the clause to satisfy them that they could

not call upon them to pay more than 1d. in the pound for a year, and it was impossible to go beyond the law. But even if it were so, as Mr. Gilmore had said, they had the power of removing anyone who did not carry out the wishes of the ratepayers. They had exercised that power before now, and what they had done they could do again, only what they did let them do it honestly and straightforwardly. (Applause.) Let them not reject that important subject because they might never have another opportunity. He was thoroughly convinced that, without the assistance of that Act, it would be no use to erect a Wedgwood memorial. He was sure it would not be maintained with satisfaction and advantage to the town without that Act. (Applause.) Therefore he desired them, one and all, to support that important proposition. It was not for them alone. They were about to legislate for the rising generation. What was a paltry £200 for a town like Burslem. In fact it was only poor interest for the capital, and surely, if they could get a building given to them worth £5,000 or £6,000, it would be shabby and contemptible in them not to support it. (Applause.) He was not speaking from interested motives, but he was convinced of the necessity of the measure. A remark had been made that a man would not be inclined to go night after night to the institution after a hard day's work, but, as he understood the Libraries Act, it was not necessary for him to go every night, because, by a reference to two neighbours, he could take books out and read them at home. (Applause.) That, he thought, was a privilege. In a report which he had recently seen of the Birkenhead Free Library, it was stated that the number of books taken out exceeded the population of the town by 2,000 or 3,000. The population, he believed, was something like 41,000, and the number of books taken out was 43,000. It was the same in Manchester, Liverpool, and other places, and he had no doubt if they had a free library there would be a free circulation. He believed that was essentially necessary for the good of the institution. It was, therefore, not always necessary for a man to go to the institution, but he was satisfied when a man had gone once he would go again. (Applause.) The best thing they could do would be to support the adoption of the Act; he hoped everyone present would do so, and he was sure they would never have cause for regret. (Applause.)

Mr. J. MACINTYRE said it was his intention to have replied to some of the objections which had been raised in the room, but the two last speakers had so completely answered them that he would not touch upon them. There were, however, one or two other points. Reference had been made to the rate, which it had been explained could not exceed 1d. in the pound, and that would not be a separate rate from the ordinary Board of

Health rate, but would be included in it, which was an important matter, and what was more important still, while he had anything to do with the Board, if he could help it, the rate, including that penny, should never exceed what it was at present, and he hoped to live to see the day when it would be much lowered. (Applause.) Another thing they should bear in mind. Great men, members of the nobility, gentlemen throughout the land, manufacturers and tradesmen generally, had contributed to that institution, and not only they but the working-men on the manufactories. He from the first was anxious that it should be carried into effect successfully, but he could assure them that during the last two years he had been almost broken-hearted. He never could see the way clear to the erection of that building, simply because he saw a difficulty in having it supported. He was satisfied the amount of the rate was so small that it would not be felt by any, while the town would reap far higher advantages than the money it would have to pay. Besides they must bear in mind that a large amount of that rate would be paid by the manufacturers and by the occupiers of large premises, so that the small amount which the poor would have to pay ought not to be objected to. Mr. Goodfellow stated that the working-men would not have time to go to the library in the evening, but look back on the last two or three years and see how many hundreds of poor idle fellows had wandered about with no place to go to, not even the public-house, for that was shut against them, because they had not got sixpence in their pockets. (Laughter.) Did they think if there had been a place of that kind to go to it would not have been much more satisfactory and elevating? (Applause.) They could not for a moment hesitate to see the advantages, for as one man had said, if he did not benefit others would. Many people thought that it was only those who went to learn to draw who would be benefited, but the humblest labourer, the bricklayer, or the collier would be benefited, if not directly, indirectly, because if orders come into the town where the arts were cultivated work would be increased, and they would find employment which they now found it difficult to get. And, again, destitution existed in that town to a much greater extent than it ought to do. People spent their money in the public house, and although the Wedgwood Institute when erected would not hold all who went to such houses still education would be an advantage, and it would be much better to go on in that way, and by reducing the destitution to reduce the rates of the town. (Applause.) They would see that he had no interest in it; he had contributed his mite, and so had men in every class of society, high and low, rich and poor, because there were no sectarian differences in the way. Everyone had seen that it would be the best thing for Burslem,

and he was sure they would reap advantages which would not be soon forgotten. (Applause.)

Mr. GOODFELLOW said he was not against the institution, but did not like the taxation when he understood that parties had to go to it to read there. If they could take the books away with them to read he should have no objection. (Great cheering.)

The CHAIRMAN said that in every town where the Act was in operation parties could take books home with them to read, and not only could do so but to a very great extent did do. (Applause.) That morning he was reading the last report of the Liverpool Free Library, which dwelt on the fact that out of probably 500,000 volumes which had been taken out during the year, only four volumes had been lost, and the total loss in ten years only amounted to £2 7s. (Applause.) Before he put the motion he must request that any person who was not a ratepayer would take no part.

The motion was then put and carried with acclamation, not more than half-a-dozen voting against it.

The CHAIRMAN then said he had no hesitation in declaring that the Public Libraries' Act of 1855 had been adopted for the district of Burslem. (Loud applause.)

Mr. W. MADDOCK then said he must congratulate them on their achievement, which he was sure would be of immense value to their children. He could speak from fifty years' experience, twenty-five of which he had passed at one place conducting the designing and decorative department, and he had no hesitation in saying that if they possessed as much facility with regard to taste and education in art as they possessed with regard to manipulative power, there would be no people in civilized Europe who would stand a better chance of success than the people of the Staffordshire Potteries. (Applause.) But to come to the subject he had to bring before them. Their worthy chairman had always been ready to come forward on any occasion when the public interest could be served, and he was sure they would heartily respond to the proposition which he had to make, namely, to move a vote of thanks to Mr. Hill for calling and presiding over the meeting. (Applause.)

Mr. GOODWIN seconded the motion, which was passed with acclamation.

The CHAIRMAN said he thanked them very sincerely for the kind way in which they had received the motion. He could assure them he esteemed it a great privilege to have presided there that evening, and the best thanks he had received was the hearty way in which they had adopted the Act. (Applause.)

The meeting then separated.

(From the Sentinel of September 5th, 1863.)

THE people of the Potteries are gradually and effectually ridding themselves of the reproach which men of taste and enterprise have so long and so freely cast upon them for their lack of public spirit. To a stranger the term "Potteries" has hitherto been suggestive of anything but pleasing ideas. Smoke, dirt, and vulgarity, stand foremost in the fancy of a foreigner, whenever the Potteries are spoken of, and a personal visit to the scene has only tended to fix these fancies in the mind as a solid and permanent impression. Within the past ten or twelve years much has been done towards removing this impression, and giving to the Potteries a character of which no Pottery man need be ashamed, and which many a manufacturing district may very well envy. If there be not less smoke, there is certainly less dirt, less vulgarity, and less ignorance, and we would fain hope, a proportionately less amount of vice. In addition to the rapid extension in size of the various Pottery towns, the great improvements in the roads and streets of the district, the increased facilities for local transit, and the rise of public buildings and public institutions, testify alike to the increased wealth and the growing enterprise of the Pottery people. Very much, of course, still remains to be accomplished, but if the next ten years should only prove as fruitful in public improvements as the past ten have been there will be very little to complain of. The improvements of late years are all the more creditable in view of the fact that they have been accomplished in the midst of anything but prosperous times. For several years past at least, bad markets and bad debts have been sadly too much the rule, and the fact has exercised a very sensible effect on the public spirit of the district. The present year, with all its serious drawbacks, bids fair to be anything but a barren one, thanks to the enterprise of the good people of Burslem, who, not content that the memory of their illustrious townsman should only be honoured and perpetuated by a mere statue in bronze, have unanimously determined to supply their grateful and admiring homage in a form which, while it

does not overlook the importance of the artistic and ornamental, shall combine also high and permanent utility. Without wishing for a moment to disparage the very beautiful statue lately erected in front of Stoke Station, which as a work of art has scarcely been surpassed, and which, as a memento of the great potter, forms both an appropriate and an essential ornament to the district, we may yet be allowed to say that Wedgwood's own townsmen were hardly likely to rest contented without some further and more localised monument to the memory of their great chief. It would have been to their discredit had they done so. The idea of the Institute was a very happy one, and we congratulate the Burslem people on the courage and perseverance with which they have fought their way through unnumbered difficulties towards its realization. Whatever opinions we may entertain as to the comparative merits of a statue and a public institute, there can be no question as to which the spirit of Wedgwood would prefer could he be consulted, and as little question can there be as to the opinion of posterity.

The adoption, in connection with the Institute of the Libraries' and Museums' Act is another and still more important step in the right direction, inasmuch as it insures in a manner and to an extent that could not be done in any other way permanent, and enlarging success in the main object of the project, viz., the education and moral elevation of the people. The provisions of this Act we give in another column. In the case of Burslem, the very unanimous and spirited manner in which the Act has been adopted renders all argument and persuasion on our part unnecessary, and only leaves us but the one duty of earnest congratulation and praise. Considering the immense success which has attended the Free Library movement in other towns, and the vast educational and moral advantages it has secured to all classes of the community wherever a Free Library has been established, it is not too much to say that the adoption of the Act in Burslem constitutes an important epoch in the history of the Pottery district. In no less than twenty

important towns the Act has already been adopted, and the reports from year to year are of the most satisfactory character.

One gentleman who has had long and practical experience in the working of Free Libraries states: "My opinion of Free Libraries is, that next to the preaching of the Gospel I know of no agency so effectual in humanizing, and improving the habits and characters of the working population of this country." This opinion is amply borne out by the experience of everyone who has had an opportunity of observing for himself.

We hope, now that Burslem has taken the lead, the other towns in the Potteries will at once see the desirableness of following so good an example, and that, in the course of a few years, every town in the district will find itself blessed with the incalculable boon of a free and flourishing library.